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THE TRIAL OF CHRIS BLESSING

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PORT CLINTON

YouTube Video of Chris Blessing Trial Verdict: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HcOh8Q5jFw>

Story, 3:45 p.m.

A jury found former Put-in-Bay bar manager Chris Blessing not guilty on two counts of rape Thursday afternoon.

Blessing, 32, was accused of raping a former fellow employee in May 2014. The jury deliberated for more than two hours before they acquitted Blessing of the charges.

Defense attorney Tom DeBacco said the woman who accused Blessing of rape didn't tell a believable story. He said her alleged blackout contrasted with the testimonies of other witnesses who said they saw the woman dancing and making out with Blessing before the incident.

"I don't think the jury believed her testimony," DeBacco said. "I didn't believe her story."

The woman claimed she went barhopping with Blessing and a few other people on May 4, 2014, in Put-in-Bay. The woman said she and Blessing became intoxicated throughout the day and that she couldn't remember anything after 5:30 p.m., right around the time she claimed Blessing handed her a drink.

The next thing she remembered was waking up in Blessing's bedroom, she testified Tuesday.

She claimed Blessing used vulgar language, took her clothes off and had sex with her. She also said she tried to say no but was unable to do so and felt strange and almost immobile.

"I was confused and scared and I said I was on my period," the woman testified Tuesday. "I couldn't move or fight or do anything and my clothes were being taken off of me."

The woman didn't pursue charges until about two weeks later, leaving little chance to find any evidence that she was drugged. Her hair sample was never tested for proof of any drugs in her system.

The sexual assault nurse who examined the woman and Ottawa County Sheriff's detective Amanda Cross both testified that the woman wasn't in a state of mind to consent on May 4, 2014.

The defense's testimonies told a different story.

Blessing claimed the day didn't start out with them together, but a series of events lead to consensual sex later that night in his home. Several witnesses testified that the woman was dancing, walking around and making out with Blessing throughout the night.

"There was nothing that indicated the opposite," Blessing testified Wednesday about the woman's interest in having sex. "She was into it. The events leading up to that point lead to that. I couldn't understand anything more than her saying yes. I don't know what else I could understand."

Blessing said the pair got out of his truck after a night of partying, went into his bedroom and began the act."

"Going forward there was no hesitation," Blessing said.

Blessing immediately hugged close friends and family members following his acquittal.

"I think sincerity is able to be seen by people," DeBacco said. "That's why I love juries. Every time a jury reaches a verdict America wins."

Day One Coverage:

Story, 7:00 p.m.

The trial of a Put-in-Bay bar manager accused of "roofie" raping a woman in May 2014 started with testimony from the alleged victim Tuesday morning.

The trial was heard in Ottawa County Common Pleas Court.

Chris Blessing, 32, was indicted and charged with rape in August 2014 for the alleged sex crime earlier that summer on Put-in-Bay.

The alleged victim, a 25-year-old woman, said she went out drinking with Blessing and several other people on a Sunday in early May of last year. The woman testified that they participated in "Sunday Funday," an activity many of the island restaurant employees join as a way to relax at the end of a busy weekend.

The woman worked at Mr. Ed's Bar and Grill and Blessing was her boss. Blessing called the woman on May 4, 2014, and asked her to bring his phone to another bar as he forgot it at Mr. Ed's.

The woman agreed, brought Blessing his phone, then joined him and a small group of people as they visited different bars.

The alleged victim said she was no stranger to alcohol and that she had been intoxicated before. But she claimed this experience was different and that she was handed a drink sometime that afternoon and then doesn't remember anything until she woke up in Blessing's bed.

"I know that I came to in a pitch black room," the woman said. "I was confused and scared and I said I was on my period. I couldn't move or fight or do anything and my clothes were being taken off of me. He pulled my tampon out of me, threw it on the ground, and proceeded to get on top of me."

The woman became emotional during her testimony and started to cry as she recounted the encounter with Blessing.

"Then I didn't know what to do or think," the woman said. "He was saying weird things like he loved me. All I can tell you are the things I remember hearing."

The woman said she felt strange and that it was difficult to move. She also claimed that when she tried to move but Blessing held her down.

She also said she asked Blessing to put on a condom after she woke up.

"Her goal was to get the Blessing off of her," prosecutor Joe Gerber said. "This man was her boss and she just wanted it to end."

The woman was the only person to give testimony Tuesday.

"I would never have sex with Chris Blessing," the woman said. "I've never had an ounce of attraction to him sexually."

Blessing's attorney, Tom DeBacco, claimed the woman showed signs that she was interested in his client.

"Sex was a topic of conversation," DeBacco said of the pair. "He was starting to get very interested in her. It was after this point that all of the kissing and making out occurred."

DeBacco said several people saw the two kissing in public. He said they eventually left one of the bars and got into Blessing's car.

"Chris asked what house she wanted to go to and she said she didn't care," DeBacco said. "So he drove them to his house. She agreed to go but conveniently doesn't remember any of this today."

Gerber played a recording of a phone conversation between the victim and Blessing sometime after the alleged rape. During the call Blessing said the two had sex and that she was into the idea the time.

"This is two people who drank each other pretty and had sex," DeBacco said. "This is not a case of rape, this is a case of regret."

The trial is set to continue at 8:30 a.m. Wednesday.

Update, 3:50 p.m.

The trial went into recess for the day at 3:50 p.m. with the conclusion of the alleged victim's testimony. The trial will resume Wednesday morning at 8:30 a.m. in Ottawa County Common Pleas Court.

Update, 3:20 p.m.

The alleged victim is still on the witness stand. Judge Bruce Winters called for a short recess. The trial will resume at 3:40 p.m.

Update, 2:40 p.m.

The trial has resumed and the prosecutor is about to play an audio recording of a call between the alleged victim and Chris Blessing.

Update, 2:18 p.m.

The trial is taking a short break while prosecutor Joe Gerber sets up a recording of a phone conversation between Blessing and the alleged victim. The trial will resume at 2:30 p.m.

To recap, Mr. Ed's Bar and Grill manager Chris Blessing is represented by Tom DeBacco. He was indicted with rape in August 2014.

Update, 2:15 p.m.

The alleged victim continued her testimony.

"I would never have sex with Chris Blessing," the woman, 25, said. "I've never had an ounce of attraction to him sexually."

Update, 2:00 p.m.

The alleged victim is recounting the sexual encounter between her and Chris Blessing.

"I put myself in a state of denial," the alleged victim said recalling the experience. "I didn't fight. I was very confused."

Update, 1:45 p.m.,

The alleged victim is recalling the day of May 4, 2014, when she went out drinking with a few people including Chris Blessing.

Update, 1:30 p.m.

A jury of eight men, four women and two alternates are currently hearing testimony from the victim.

Update 1:15 p.m.

The alleged victim, 25, is currently giving testimony on the witness stand. She is talking about her typical day working at Mr. Ed's Bar and Grill on Put-in-Bay.

Update, 1:00 p.m.

The trial is set to resume after the short lunch break. Opening arguments have been given and witnesses will be called soon.

Original post, 11:30 a.m.

The attorneys are currently giving their opening arguments to the jury.